



Video spreads false claims about immigrants

Josh Kelety

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A video from 2018 featuring two prominent conservative activists making claims about immigrants coming into the U.S. has resurfaced and is circulating widely on social media.

In the clip, [Charlie Kirk](#), the founder of the conservative group Turning Point USA, and Candace Owens, a conservative commentator, are speaking to a live audience about immigration and calling for a border wall. But experts say many of the claims they make to support their argument are false or misleading.

The video, shared on Facebook on Sunday, has since been viewed over 2 million times. It was originally recorded at an event at Stanford University in 2018 where both Kirk and Owens spoke.

Here's a closer look at claims made in the video.

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CLAIM: 50% of the immigrants America “takes in” are from Mexico.

THE FACTS: False. The percentage of Mexican nationals who are granted permanent legal authorization to live in the U.S. is significantly lower than 50%. Mexican nationals also do not make up 50% of the immigrants who attempt to enter the U.S. illegally, experts say.

Of the roughly 1 million immigrants who were granted permanent legal residency status in 2019, only 153,502 were from Mexico, according to recent [data](#) published by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Similarly, people from Mexico made up only 37% of all of the encounters with migrants reported by authorities at the southwest border in fiscal 2021, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). The remaining 63% were people from other countries.

“When you take all types of immigrants, documented, undocumented, it’s not true for sure,” said Ernesto Castañeda, director of the Immigration Lab at American University.

Additionally, the proportion of Mexicans who compose the population of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally has declined over time. As of 2017, 47% of the immigrants living in the U.S. illegally were Mexican, according to the [Pew Research Center](#).

“The Mexican undocumented population has stopped growing since 2008 and there is no sign that is going to catch up to historical levels again,” Castañeda said.

Owens responded to the AP’s request for comment but did not provide evidence to support this claim.

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CLAIM: Immigrants living in the U.S. illegally who come from Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador are “twice as likely” to commit crime than U.S.-born citizens.

THE FACTS: False. Research shows that immigrants living in the U.S. without legal permission commit crimes at lower rates in comparison to citizens born in the country. Experts say no evidence supports the notion that immigrants from those specific countries commit more crime.

“It is false. Very false and troubling,” said Denise Gilman, director of the Immigration Clinic at the University of Texas at Austin School of Law. “There is a lot of empirical evidence that goes in the other direction.”

“Almost every reputable report that I have seen has found that immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than native born U.S. citizens,” said Stephen Yale-Loehr, a professor at Cornell University who teaches immigration law.

Yale-Loehr cited a [2020 study](#) published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, a peer-reviewed journal. The study used data from the Texas Department of Public Safety and found that immigrants living in the U.S. illegally have “substantially lower crime rates than native-born citizens and legal immigrants across a range of felony offenses.”

Gilman pointed to a [2014 study](#) published in the Journal of Law and Economics that found a program that allowed the federal government to check the immigration status of people arrested by local police and place them in federal custody for deportation proceedings had “no observable effect on the overall crime rate.”

When asked to provide evidence for Kirk’s claim, Andrew Kolvet, a spokesperson for Turning Point USA, pointed to a 2018 news story about a report from the Crime Prevention Research Center, a conservative nonprofit, which found that immigrants between the ages of 15 and 35 who were living in the U.S. illegally accounted for almost 8% of Arizona’s prison population, despite being around 2% of the state’s population. The report also concluded that immigrants living in the U.S. illegally are significantly more likely to be convicted of crime than “other Arizonans.”

But the paper has “significant problems,” Gilman wrote in an email to the AP. She noted that the paper was not peer-reviewed and that the author failed to account for prosecutors’ potential bias against immigrants.

“There is no effort to control for prosecutorial predilection towards prosecuting undocumented persons or migrants,” Gilman wrote. “In other words, it may well be that migrants do not commit more crimes but are instead prosecuted at higher rates.”

“The whole methodology is very questionable and the basic explanation of the method is not sound,” Ingrid Eagly, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, wrote in an email to the AP.

Castañeda wrote in an email to the AP that the finding that immigrants living in the U.S. illegally are overrepresented in Arizona’s prisons “does not mean they were committing more or worse crime.”

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CLAIM: There are 21 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally.

THE FACTS: False. Many credible sources gauge the total number as around 10 million.

In response to the AP’s questions, Kolvet of Turning Point USA pointed to a 2018 study published in PLOS ONE, a peer-reviewed journal, that found that as many as 22 million immigrants could be living in the U.S. illegally.

However, this is just one estimate based on a variety of assumptions, and experts who spoke to the AP pointed to other credible sources that determined that the figure was far smaller.

“Their numbers of 21 million are just wildly off base,” Yale-Loehr said, referring to Kirk’s claim. “They are double what reputable research organizations have found.”

He pointed to the Pew Research Center, which estimated that 10.5 million immigrants were living in the U.S. illegally as of 2017. The Pew Research Center also found in 2018 that immigrants who overstayed their visa make up an increasing share of that population.

Eagly cited 2019 statistics published by the Migration Policy Institute, a nonpartisan think tank, which estimated that roughly 11 million immigrants are living in the U.S. illegally.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security estimated that there were 11.4 million immigrants living in the U.S. illegally in 2018.

“The numbers presented in this study are outliers as compared to the estimates provided in numerous other studies,” Gilman wrote in an email to the AP.

“One study does not cancel many studies showing different findings using different data sources and methods,” Castañeda wrote in an email to the AP. “The consensus from experts is different from those of the speakers in the video.”

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CLAIM: Immigrants living in the U.S. illegally get welfare benefits and 80% never stop using welfare.

THE FACTS: False. Immigrants living in the U.S. illegally don’t qualify for most federal welfare benefits, such as food stamps, experts say.

“Undocumented immigrants absolutely don’t qualify for benefits,” Gilman said. “In fact, even green card holders, lawful permanent residents, are not eligible for food stamps, Medicaid for five years after they get their green card.”

Gilman pointed to a 2018 report published by the CATO Institute, a libertarian think tank, that found that immigrants who qualify for federal benefits “are less likely to consume welfare benefits and, when they do, they generally consume a lower dollar value of benefits than native-born Americans.”

When asked to provide evidence for her claim, Owens pointed to a 2002 report published by the Brookings Institution discussing the details of federal law governing welfare benefits for noncitizens. She also cited a 2011 report from the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for less immigration, that determined that immigrant households with children used welfare programs at a higher rate than “native households with children.”

The 2002 Brookings Institution report states that use of welfare by legal permanent residents has declined by a faster rate than use of such benefits by citizens, Yale-Loehr noted in an email to the AP.

“The CIS report doesn’t distinguish between legal and illegal immigrants,” Yale-Loehr wrote. “Neither report states that 80% of undocumented immigrants never go off welfare. The bottom line: These two reports fail to support Candace Owens’ claim.”